Bard College Berlin
A LIBERAL ARTS UNIVERSITY

LT 205 – Theory and Literature

Tuesdays and Thursdays 14:00-15:30

Seminar Leader: Prof. Dr. Laura Scuriatti
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Office Hours: by appointment

Course Description

This course examines some of the most influential and disruptive intellectual developments of the last century: the emergence and application of psychoanalytic theory (most notably in the work of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan); a rethinking of ideology and culture in the wake of Marxism (seen in the Frankfurt School, Louis Althusser, Fredric Jameson); the rise of structuralism (synthesized from the contributions of Ferdinand de Saussure and Roman Jakobson); and the turn to post-structuralism (Roland Barthes), deconstruction (Jacques Derrida), post-colonial theory (Edward Said, Kwame Anthony Appiah and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak), and gender and queer theory (Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Judith Butler). The course also offers a few examples of how the different theories have generated critical approaches, different kinds of readings and interpretations of texts.

The trajectory traced in this course is sometimes invoked by the one-word appellation, Theory, but is drawn from philosophy, anthropology, linguistics, political economy, psychology, and history. Despite the multidisciplinary origins, the epicenter of each of these approaches has been, and remains, the study of literature. This course will therefore attempt to answer an urgent question: What is it about literature that encourages and amplifies radical theorizing?

Participants are required to acquire the following texts in paper or digital form:

Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts*

All other texts will be available in digital form on Google Classroom.

Requirements

Students are required to attend all classes, to come to class prepared, to participate actively, and to bring the relevant materials and textbooks. Participation consists in contributing productively to class discussion in a respectful manner, and in demonstrating a sound knowledge of the texts assigned.

Please note that in seminars we will work on printed texts: NO COMPUTERS OR TABLETS allowed in class. Texts which are made available in digital format should be printed for use in class.
All assignments must be completed in order to pass the course.

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Accommodations

Bard College Berlin is committed to inclusion and providing equal access to all students; we uphold and maintain all aspects of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and Section 3 of the German Disability Equality Act of April 27, 2002 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1468). If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, Atticus Kleen, (accommodations@berlin.bard.edu) to request an official accommodation.

Requests for accommodations should be made as early as possible to ensure adequate time for coordination and planning. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and may require advance notice to implement.

If you have already been approved for accommodations with the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, please arrange to meet with me outside of class so that we can develop an implementation plan.

Students may face extenuating circumstances related to various personal or external factors, which impact their academic performance. While these circumstances often do not fall within the legal framework of Disability Accommodations, Bard College Berlin is committed to supporting students experiencing such circumstances. A student needing a short extension or a replacement assignment because of an extenuating circumstance is encouraged to make arrangements directly with instructors if possible. If further support is needed, please visit the Bard College Berlin Accessibility page. Questions about this process can be directed to James Harker (j.harker@berlin.bard.edu) or Maria Anderson-Long (m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu).

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences per semester from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

Lateness is disrupting and disrespectful. Arriving late to class will be considered equivalent to an absence if it a regular occurrence (i.e. if it happens more than 3 times over the semester).

Bard College Berlin may not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30%

of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

Remote access to class is not offered in this course.

Use of Electronic Devices

To facilitate a focused and engaging seminar discussion the use of electronic devices during class time is not allowed, unless for disability accommodation. If you have a disability accommodation, please inform your instructor at the beginning of the semester.

Assessment

Students will be assessed on the basis of their participation, the quality of their contribution to class discussion, and on the quality of their submitted assignments. Lateness and absences will impact negatively on the participation grade.

Assignments

Assignments for this course consist in:

- 2 in-class exams: Thursday, October 1 and Tuesday, December 8 (circa 4000 words in total)
- 1 presentation on chosen assigned texts: max 20 minutes. Students should submit their presentation notes after delivering the presentation (circa 2000 words).

All assignments must be completed in order to pass the course. Should a student be sick during the exam day or on the day of their scheduled presentations, it will be possible to schedule an alternative date for the missed assignment. Students who are sick on the day of the exam or of the presentation should present a medical certificate issued on that day.

An unexcused absence on the day of the assigned presentation or exam will result in a F for that assignment.

Assignments Deadlines:

Thursday, October 1: IN-CLASS EXAM
Tuesday, December 8: IN-CLASS EXAM

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students will receive feedback for their course work during and at the end of the semester. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

Grade Breakdown

Participation: 30%
Midterm exam: 25%
Presentation: 20%
Final exam: 25%

Schedule

Week 1

Introduction – Marx and Marxist Criticism
Tuesday, September 1

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels
Excerpts from:
Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844
The German Ideology
The Communist Manifesto
Grundrisse
A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy
Introduction

Thursday, September 3
Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Capital* (excerpts)
T. Piketty, BBC interview about economic inequality and Jane Austen
https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p020wmkt
Extra readings: T. Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (excerpts)

Week 2

Tuesday, September 8
Fredric Jameson, "On Interpretation: Literature as a Socially Symbolic Act"

Freud
Thursday, September 10
Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (excerpts)

Week 3

Tuesday, September 15
Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny'", "Fetishism"

Thursday, September 17
Sigmund Freud, "On Jensen's *Gradiva*"

The Frankfurt School

Week 4

Tuesday, September 22
Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" (excerpts);

Thursday, September 24
Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses"

Week 5

Tuesday, September 29
Jürgen Habermas, "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article"; "Modernity—An Incomplete Project" (excerpts)

Thursday, October 1
In-class exam

Origins of Structuralism

Week 6

Tuesday, October 6
Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (excerpts)

Thursday, October 8
Roman Jakobson, *Linguistics and Poetics; Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances* (excerpts)

Week 7

Tuesday, October 13
Roland Barthes, "An Introduction to the Structuralist Analysis of Narrative"

The Encounter of Structuralism and Psychoanalysis

Thursday, October 15
Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience"

Fall Break

Week 8

Tuesday, October 27
Jacques Lacan, "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious"; "The Signification of the Phallus" (excerpts)

Lacan Reading Poe
Thursday, October 29
E. A. Poe, "The Purloined Letter"; Jacques Lacan, "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'"

Week 9 – Applying Critical Methodologies. The Case of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper"

Tuesday, November 3 and Thursday, November 5
Readings: *The Captive Imagination: A Casebook on* The Yellow Wallpaper (excerpts)
Student-led seminars and presentations

Deconstruction and Poststructuralism

Week 10

Tuesday, November 10 and November 12
Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (excerpts)

Week 11

Tuesday, November 17
J. Hillis Miller, "The Critic as a Host"

Postcolonial Theory
Kwame Anthony Appiah, "The Postcolonial and the Postmodern"
G. Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism"

Thursday, November 19
Edward Said, *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism* (excerpts)

Week 12 - Guest teacher: Prof. Annalisa Volpone (University of Perugia): Derrida reading Joyce

Tuesday, November 24 and Thursday, November 26
Readings TBD

Gender and Queer Theory

Week 13

Tuesday, December 1
Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men. English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*; *The Epistemology of the Closet* (excerpts)

Thursday, December 3
Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (excerpts)

Week 14

Tuesday, December 8
In-class exam

Thursday, December 10
Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts*